HEALTHY COMMUNITIES HEALTHY YOUTH

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

ASSET #7: Community Values Youth

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they perceive that adults in the community value youth.

25%
of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.*

What Are Assets? Assets are 40 values, experiences, and qualities that help kids succeed. "Community values youth" is one of four empowerment assets.

* Based on Search Institute surveys of 217,277 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States during the 1999–2000 school year.

Seeing from a Child's View

Our perceptions make a big difference in how we feel and act. When we feel that a place is dangerous, we will usually avoid going there if possible. When we sense that someone could hurt us, we try to protect ourselves.

From an early age, children perceive who is warm and friendly and who is cold and distant. They crawl into laps of people who interact with them, hug them, and play with them. They run from aggressive, barking dogs and adults who yell.

As children grow older, they still quickly sense where they are wanted and where they "get in the way." How does your child perceive adults in your community? Does your child feel that adults take seriously the opinions and ideas of children? Does your child have opportunities to participate, serve, lead, and

make decisions within your community? Does your child feel that your community is a good place for children and youth?

Your child's perceptions can tell you a lot about your community, the adults in your community, and what needs to happen so that children and youth feel their community values them. Your child's perceptions are important barometers. Check them often. You need to accept your child's perceptions, even though they may not be what you expect or hope they would be. Work to make the community a place that values its youth.

Rate Your Community

*With your child, check the parts of your community that value children and youth:*

- ❑ *Your family*
- ❑ *Your school*
- ❑ *Your neighborhood*
- ❑ *Social services you know*
- ❑ *Your congregation*
- ❑ *Youth organizations you know*
- ❑ *Businesses you know*
- ❑ *Your library*
- ❑ *Your health-care provider*
- ❑ *Your city government*
- ❑ *Your overall community*

time together

Three ways to improve your child's perceptions of your community, and vice versa:

1. Attend a family community event together, such as an outdoor concert.

2. Take a community class on a topic such as art, exercise, or computers.

3. Invite a neighbor family to have a picnic with your family at one of your community parks.

4 Ways to Build This Asset
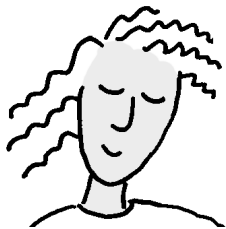
Children and youth perceive that the community and adults value them when:

1. Adults take time to be with them.

2. Adults listen and take seriously what they have to say.

3. Adults seek out young people and solicit their feedback.

4. Adults let them know their presence and participation are appreciated.

More Help for Parents

Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. This book highlights community success stories from around the United States and offers strategies for those successes. (Published by ACTA Publications. Available from Search Institute, www.search-institute.org; 800-888-7828.)

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- Overall, do you feel our community values children and young people? Why or why not?
- How do people in the community show they love and appreciate you?
- Which adults help you feel empowered and valuable? Why?

Final Word

"The community must assume responsibility for each child."
—Pearl S. Buck